

The Honorable Donald W. Molloy
United States District Judge
United States District Court
District of Montana
201 E. Broadway
Missoula, MT 59802

Dear Judge Molloy,

My name is Christopher D. Wernick and I write this correspondence on behalf of my uncle, Matthew A. Marshall. I have struggled for weeks trying to capture my thoughts and articulate them properly for your consideration prior to sentencing. While I have never imagined writing a letter in this context, I will do my very best to represent my thoughts that best describe my uncle, father figure, and honorable man that I have always known him to be.

My uncle was always there for me and my two older sisters while we were growing up. He managed to fill a void that was always seemingly present because of the marital discord that was a running theme with my mother and father. As their issues started to bleed over into how we were being raised, I started acting out in many different ways often times resulting in me getting into trouble, both at school and then at home. It honestly was a vicious cycle that me and my siblings were caught in the middle of and at the time I don't think anyone realized the impact it was having on us. As the tensions became increasingly volatile, my behaviors became more extreme. Little did I know those decisions I was making would have a significant impact on my future.

When I was 12 years old, my parents were in the midst of a divorce and we lived in chaos. A time capsule project at school turned into disaster for me and ultimately led me being suspended from middle school pending police investigation. I had written threats directed at some fellow students and it caused alarm for my teacher and school administrators. I make no excuse for it because in hindsight they made the appropriate decisions and I was held accountable for my actions. During a school administration meeting with school board members and police, I mentioned that I was worried that my uncle was going to "kick my butt" when he got word of what happened. When the police officer asked me who my uncle was, I said he was also a State Police Officer. As fate had it, this officer (who was a Detective) knew my uncle. The Detective's brother was also a State Police officer at the same post my uncle worked out of and were very close friends. Shortly after this meeting, I learned my uncle had driven across the state to meet me and my parents. My life took a drastic change from that moment on and to say that my uncle, Matthew Marshall, intervening saved me would be the biggest understatement of my life. I was on a downward spiral heading towards a very bad place, and my Uncle saw past the "goth kid" who hated everything and everyone, and stepped in when it felt like no one else wanted to.

Within months, my parents had agreed to let me move in with my uncle and his new wife, Heather Marshall. At the time, I didn't realize how them taking me in was also a tremendous personal and financial burden on them. I will never forget the first hour I was at their home when my uncle had gotten me settled into my room and told me to gather up all of my clothes, shoes, coats, and miscellaneous belongings. I was overwhelmed, angry, and confused at his request to place all of my stuff into three large trash bags. I eventually did what he asked with my anger growing by the second. I asked him why he was doing this and he told me something that I will never forget as long as I live. He looked me in the eye and said everything in those bags represented my past, my mistakes, my failures, my hurt, and my anger. He said tomorrow would be a new day and a new beginning. I remember standing there feeling a huge burden being lifted off of me. I was 12 years old and my uncle gave me a chance to build a future surrounded by love and compassion.

I lived with my uncle and my aunt Heather for the next 6 years while I finished high school. As graduation was nearing I told him that I wanted to enlist in the Marine Corps and to carry on a family tradition. My grandfather, my father, and all of my uncles were former Marines and I wanted to carry that on. I can't say my uncle was thrilled about the idea and made every attempt to steer me towards the Air Force, but he ultimately respected my decision and drove me to the recruiter's office to seek enlistment. After graduation from high school I was off to boot camp and eventually a year later I was heading to my first duty station in Hawaii. I was now off embarking on an adventure and challenge working as an Intel Marine.

As I look back and see how my life had already taken a drastic turn for the better, I am forever thankful for what my uncle did for me. He showed me by example of what it meant to be selfless and put others at the forefront of our decisions. As I was midway through my enlistment I found myself being deployed to Iraq during Operation Enduring Freedom. I knew that my uncle had been in Iraq sometime in 2003 and into 2004 but didn't know what or where he was located. None of our family had any idea and even aunt Heather wasn't sure. When I was told all of our platoons were heading to be sent into Ramadi, I felt a bit afraid and anxious of what was going to happen. Regardless of MOS, every Marine was conducting foot patrols and security sweeps through the streets of Ramadi and I had my first taste of what warfare looked like. After being in country for a couple of months I received an email from my uncle asking me if there was anything me and my fellow Marines needed and that he would send whatever equipment, supplies, or junk food that would make our lives a little easier and safer from Baghdad. I remember asking some of my fellow Marines what stuff we could use and the reaction was a long running joke during our deployment. It seemed surreal and a bit crazy to get a "delivery" in a war zone when it wasn't safe to even be asleep in your rack. What it did more than anything was reinforce to me that my uncle would be there for me, to protect me, to comfort me, to boost me up when I needed it most no matter where I was.

Today as I've sat and thought about all of this it seems almost impossible to fathom. I won't speak for anyone else but I can say with conviction, that my uncle, Matthew Marshall, helped save me from myself and set me on a trajectory that I would have never dreamed. I'm proud to call him my uncle, to see his strength, his courage, and his honor. I'm also proud to say that

because of the love and support of my aunt and uncle, I had a successful enlistment in the Marine Corps, graduated from college, achieved a graduate degree, and continue working towards a higher academic achievement in prehistoric archaeology while working for the US Army Corps of Engineers, Louisville District. I'm happily married with two beautiful children and I am hopeful for a good outcome but also accept that it is now in the hands of God and the court.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christopher D. Wernick', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christopher D. Wernick